



State of Connecticut GENERAL ASSEMBLY



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN



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Local Children Present Their Thoughts on Terrorism, Natural Disasters, and General Safety to State Officials

More than 260 students from across Connecticut visited the halls of state government on Tuesday, January 24, to express how they felt about their personal safety, especially in light of events like September 11 and Hurricane Katrina.

The forum, held at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford and organized by three state agencies, cemented Connecticut's place as the only state in the nation that addresses homeland security in the context of children.

With Connecticut Commission on Children Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman moderating, the students presented artwork, essays, and poetry that gave a no-holds-barred look at how they really view their world. Some expressed fear, including Stamford fifth-grader Julia Lucero, who drew a picture of one person holding a gun to another and titled it, "It's A Dark, Dark World." Many, like New London fifth-grader Hariany Lopez, showed deep compassion for the victims of Katrina and other disasters. "If a state, country, or city ever got destroyed by a hurricane," Hariany wrote, "it would mean to me that the hurricane passed by my heart, breaking it in half."

Other students were hopeful, looking to diversity and leadership as tools for improving the world. "We are all different, but it doesn't mean we shouldn't help each other," wrote Coventry fourth-grader Natasha Golovchenko.

Emergency Management and Homeland Security Commissioner James Thomas and Education Commissioner Betty Sternberg were on hand to listen to the readings and view the artwork. Thomas responded in detail about homeland security to those students who had written Gov. M. Jodi Rell and other state officials regarding their safety. Commissioner Sternberg, visibly moved by the presentations, recognized the strength of the student group as advocates who could help inform her regarding their needs.

"Students reflected concern, fear and a need to know how our state was protecting them against disaster," Zimmerman said. "They were eager to help, saw diversity as vibrant and appealing and sought to be recognized as partners in civic society. Their desire for global peace and call to compassionate engagement created an emerging picture of this generation of students."

The works presented at the forum were chosen from among the 2,300 that arrived in response to invitations issued to all Connecticut schools. For more information on the event, visit the Commission on Children website at www.cga.ct.gov/coc or contact the commission's public information officer, Kevin Flood, at (860) 240-0078 or kevin.flood@cga.ct.gov.